

STATE OF MAINE  
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

Docket No. 98-028

January 20, 1998

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION  
Emergency Moratorium on Disconnection  
of Telephone Service to Residential and  
Nonresidential Customers Without  
Electric Service due to the Recent Ice Storm

ORDER

WELCH, Chairman; NUGENT and HUNT, Commissioners

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We order a partial emergency moratorium, under Section 15 of Chapter 81, and Section 14 of Chapter 86, on the disconnection of telephone service to any customer who is without electric service due to the ice storm of January 7 and 8. The continued weather-related electric outages affecting many customers, and their neighbors, when compounded by a loss of telephone service, especially at this time of year, present a danger to the health and safety of these customers. This partial moratorium is in effect through January 29, per the provisions of Chapter 81 and 86 that provide for an initial moratorium of not more than 10 days.

The Commission appreciates the concern that Maine telephone utilities have generally shown for the welfare of their customers who may still be without electricity. Most telephone utilities indicated last week that they did not plan to pursue disconnection last week of any customers in this situation. Because of the continuing electric outages, the Commission extends that arrangement per this Order.

Before disconnecting any customer for nonpayment, telephone utilities must first contact and ask each customer whether he or she is without electric service due to the recent storm. If the customer indicates that he is still without electric service, the utility must then refrain from disconnection of telephone service until that customer's electric service is restored. We suggest that, at least for many companies, the most expeditious approach will be to wait to resume collections activity until the next billing period. Telephone utilities must not disconnect anyone with whom they have not spoken about their electric service.

The Commission reminds telephone utilities that some payment-troubled customers, and even customers in good standing, may have incurred significant storm-related expenses and/or

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losses of income. The expenses include not only damage suffered to personal property, but also the cost of fuel for alternative heating sources such as wood stoves or kerosene heaters, and other expenses, during the extended outages. The impacts of the storm on many customers' household budgets represent changes in financial circumstances that utilities should consider as they assess the reasonableness of initial and revised payment arrangements under Section 6 of Chapter 81.

Accordingly, we

O R D E R

1. That a partial emergency moratorium is in effect to prevent the disconnection of phone service to residential and nonresidential customers who are without electric service due to the Ice Storm of 1998.

2. That the Administrative Director mail an attested copy of this Order to all Maine local telephone utilities.

Dated at Augusta, Maine this 20th day of January, 1998.

BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSION

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Dennis L. Keschl  
Administrative Director

COMMISSIONERS VOTING FOR: Welch  
Nugent  
Hunt